

**PURPLE ALERT: HELPING EDUCATORS UNDERSTAND THE
UNIQUE NEEDS OF ADOLESCENTS WITH MILITARY AND
VETERANS PARENTS**

Natalie Williamson
Doctoral Candidate
Prairie View A&M University
nwilliamson@pvamu.edu

Dr. Lucian Yates, II
Professor
Prairie View A&M University
lyates@pvamu.edu

ABSTRACT

When military service members dedicate their services to protect our great nation, they sometimes leave behind their children, move with their family, or return home physical or psychologically different which cause tensions on the children. Researches have shown that the impacts of having military parents on children are numerous and evident. The review of literature studies adolescents with military parents and the impact of age development, deployment, relocation, reintegration, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on their well-being and specifically their educationally. There is also a focus on the double effects of missing parents on African American children. Single parents raise 67% of African American children. Of this number, parents serve their country in military roles to take care of these children. However, the mal effects are noticeable. The paper also presents recommendations for educators to understand the unique needs of adolescents of our brave service men and women and minimize the effects of the dilemma they face, so they can be successful in school.

Keywords: Adolescents, Military Parents, Age Development, Deployment, Relocation, Reintegration, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Well-being, Academic Success

INTRODUCTION

Purple Alert: Helping Educators Understand the Unique Needs of Adolescents with Military and Veteran Parents

The ultimate goal of educators is to help students reach success academically, regardless of their family background, ways of learning, socioeconomic status, parents and/or any other way that they differ from each other. According to the U.S Department of Education (2015) virtually all school districts educate children whose parents are serving or have served in the Armed Forces. Therefore, educators working with active duty military and veteran-parented children should be aware of students' unique needs to improve the quality of education and offer support when required.

Currently, 2,266,883 officers serve in the military (US Census Bureau, 2015). The 2000 census counted 208.1 million civilians 18 years and older of which 24.8 million (12.7%) were veterans (US Census Bureau, 2015). The combination of these service men and women has an approximate 1.2 million school-aged children. Eighty percent (80%) of this number attend public schools, while 20% attend private school or are home-schooled (U.S Department of Education, 2015).

There is always a need for persons to serve in the military. Hence, it is important for educators to understand how to best engage the student with military parents. Members who serve in the military have children attending public and private school in all school districts around the nation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Challenges of the Adolescent Years

“Adolescence is characterized by significant neurological, cognitive and socio-psychological development” (Moretti & Peled, 2004, p.551). The authors contended that during these adolescent years, adolescent-parent attachment has profound effects on cognitive, social, and emotional functioning. The need for secure attachment is associated with less engagement in high risk behaviors, fewer mental health problems, and enhanced social skills and coping strategies.

With these biological limitations along with school adjustment have created a combination that impedes young adolescents' transition to high school to become a potential source of stress. This stress is intense enough to make adolescents vulnerable and predisposed to psychosocial functioning problems (Duchesne & Larose, 2007).

Adding to the biological struggles faced by adolescents, are the impacts of having military parents deployed to war, continuous uprooting of the family to immigrate to new cities to accommodate their parents' military assignments, reintegration and the problems associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of active military and veteran (Duchesne & Larose, 2007; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; 2009; Kelley, Hock, Smith, Jarvis, Bonney & Gaffney, 2001; Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins & Pasch, 2011; Chandra, Lara-Cinisomo, Jaycox, Tanielian, Burns, Ruder, & Bing, 2010).

Deployment and Children with Active Military Parents

Deployment of military members as combatants or as peacekeepers globally is becoming more frequent and longer due to the war against terrorism (Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010). Since 911, over 2 million men and women have been deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, with over 793,000 service members being deployed multiple times (Tan, 2009), thus, separating the parents from the rest of the family (Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel, 2010). Children with a parent being deployed may exhibit added anxiety, withdrawal, anger, nonconformity, along with other emotional or behavior problems in a greater extent than children whose parents are not deployed (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Kelley, Hock, Smith, Jarvis, Bonney & Gaffney, 2001). These behaviors are noticeably up to a year after deployment ends (Lester & Flake, 2013). Children with deployed parents also have greater academic problems (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Researchers of Adolescent-parent attachment posit that fundamental bond between a parent and child is essential to survival and development (Moretti & Peled, 2004; Duchesne & Larose, 2007). During this phase, the child seeks comfort or nurturance from an attachment figure (Louie & Cromer, 2014). This comfort and nurturing promotes high self-esteem, feeling of competence, perceived social support, and a sense of being able to manipulate, understand their own world (Moretti & Peled, 2004) and psychological well-being (Nada Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992). Langton and Berger (2011) suggested that adolescents in most family types are inclined to have poorer outcomes- physical health, behavior, and emotional well-being- than those of their peers in two-biological-parent families.

Chandra, et al. (2010) conducted research to describe the health and well-being of children from military families from the perspectives of the child and non-deployed parent. The authors analyzed data obtained from a computer-assisted telephone interview with military children, aged

11 to 17 years, and non-deployed caregivers totaling 1507 to assess child well-being and difficulties with deployment. The authors concluded that overall, caregivers and children from military families reported child emotional difficulties at higher levels than have been observed in the general US population. Chandra, et al. (2010) also postulated that the larger the total months of deployment of a parent, the greater the stressors of preserving a healthy home life. For example, the authors pointed out, the longer the deployment; the more children had problems with household and school responsibilities.

Relocation of Families

Members of the military at any given time pack and relocate for duty on command. This change can result in a myriad of problems for both the adults and children (Gomez & Ybanez, 2012) and sometimes result in a feeling of alienation in the newly established home community (Kain, 1973). Children now leave behind the schools they are accustomed to, their friends, teachers and activities they had once been a part of to take on challenges of starting over in a new community. The separation from friends and extended family members can be a stressful life event for both parents and children (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins & Pasch, 2011).

Wood and Halfon (1993) in a research carried out on a nationally represented sample of 9915 children, age ranging from six to seventeen years, to identify the impact of frequent family moves on reported rates of delay in growth or development, learning disorders, school failure, and frequent behavioral problems in US school-age children. The authors concluded that frequent relocation associates with higher rates of all measures of child dysfunction-repeated grades and behavioral problems. However, there was no association with delays in growth or development or a learning disorder.

Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) analyzed data from the Texas Public Education Information Management System and the files of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills of 6000 students in Texas to clarify the relationships between mobility and academic performance. The authors found that there are significant relationships between student mobility, academic performance, and school accountability. They further explained that mobile students scored lower on the state-required tests than their peers who were stable.

Reintegration

After spending months away on active duty, whether out of the country or in another state, military member return home to pick up

where they left off bonding with their loved ones. Currie, Day and Kelloway (2011) defined reintegration as the method of transitioning back to previous personal and organizational roles after deployment. Unfortunately, it does not always work that simple. Members of the military and family members sometimes have a hard time readjusting and functioning in the family system and subsystems and usually do not return to the particular state that was preceding deployment (Louie & Cromer, 2014; Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Returning parents face the stresses of reintegration into the family which includes reacquainting with children and restoration (Williams, 2013). Doyle and Peterson (2005) expressed that this period of reintegration is specifically challenging in areas of role and boundary negotiations and reestablishment of relationships. Riggs and Riggs (2011) added that this experience of reintegration, although firstly brings on excitement families are reunited after long periods, can be frustrating and unsettling for all parties involved. Eventually, the authors added, the physical and psychological injuries experienced by these service personnel challenge their ability to reintegrate. This is most likely to cause marital problems, family dysfunction, emotional and behavioral disturbance in spouse and children. Marital conflicts, Jenkins, Simpson, Dunn, Rasbash, & O'Connor (2005) suggested, are associated with a wide range internalizing, such as depression, and particularly externalizing such as aggression outcomes in children.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Scott, Matt, Wrocklage, Crnich, Jordan, Southwick and Schweinsburg (2015) defined posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as “a common, often debilitating psychiatric disorder that is triggered by an extreme stressor involving threat of death or serious injury” (p. 106). The global war on terror has left the U.S. military and veterans with direct and indirect trauma exposure. This trauma causes reduced family cohesion, decreased interpersonal expressiveness, greater interpersonal conflict, and reduced problem solving ability (Cozza, 2005).

Lambert, Holzer, and Hasbun (2014) conducted a meta-analysis on the correlation between parents' PTSD symptom severity and children's psychological status. The authors included 42 studies that comprised parent assessed for PTSD, child assessed for distress or behavioral problems, associations between parent PTSD and child status. The authors compared effect sizes for studies where only the parent exposure to a potentially traumatic event to studies and a combination of both parents and children exposure. The authors provided indication that parental PTSD is associated with child distress and behavioral problems.

Glenn, Beckham, Feldman, Kirby, Hertzberg, and Moore (2002) studied the motional-behavioral functioning of a small sample of Vietnam veterans with combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), their partners, and older adolescent and adult children. A randomly recruited group of thirty-one (31) veteran-spouse pairs from an outpatient PTSD clinic between 1996 and 1999 with a mean age of 49.3 years made up the sample. It was resolved that hostility and violent behavior among children positively correlated to Veterans' combat exposure. Furthermore, veterans' reports of PTSD symptoms positively related with accounts of hostility and violence among children. Additionally, Moore (2002) reported that veterans' violent behavior also positively correlated with children's violent behavior.

African-American Children with Parents in the Military

Approximately 67% of African American youths live in single-parent household at some point during childhood and/or adolescence compared to 23% of youth in the general U.S. population (Sterrett, Kincaid, Ness, Gonzalez, McKee, & Jones, 2015). The authors affirmed that African American youths and those from single-mother homes, ages 10–19 show higher risk of displaying problems paralleled to European American adolescents and their peers from two-parent homes.

U.S. military fighting force is comprised of 17% African Americans, while encompassing only 13.60% of the total U.S. population (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). This signaled that a large percentage of African American adults at some point in their lives were a part of the military or armed forces. Some of these service providers are also parents of 1.2 million school-aged children (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

With a combination of having single parents, parents missing due to military responsibilities, the pressures of the adolescent life, relocation and other contributing factors, students with military parents face a plethora of challenges when they go to school each day. African American children, with a higher percentage of single parents watch their only active parent painstakingly leave them to protect the country through their unique services. Some of these children's new homes become that of family members and sometimes friends. These children endure a lot of problems including abuse and other maltreatment that lead to students' misconduct and low academic performance in school (Poehlmann, Park, Bouffiou, Abrahams, Schlafer, & Hahn, 2008; Mallett, 2012).

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS OF ADOLESCENTS WITH MILITARY PARENTS

It is increasingly imperative that educators be aware of the sensitive nature of dealing with children whose parents are actively involved in the military or have become veterans. No longer should we ignore the emotional, psychological, and behavioral impact of deployment, constant relocation, reintegration, and PTSD on the families and specifically the children. To do so effectively educators and peers should actively participate in making students feel appreciated and welcomed in the school.

Selection of military personnel for relocation can come at any time. The family therefore moves with that person to a new community. This event can be stressful and disorienting for the family and especially the children. The school they have come to know as their own is no longer the one they will attend. This means they will have a new teacher, see new classmates, and must become adjusted to new setting. Schools should be aware and prepared to handle this integration as smoothly as possible. Slow adjustment could cause a gap in the child's educational development. The quicker the child feels adjusted in the new environment the quicker he or she will be able to grow educationally. Law, Cuskelly, & Carroll (2013) stated that non-familial social environments can positively impact a child's emotional functioning. Hence, school should also integrate the following six preventative care tasks to foster military and veteran students' wellbeing.

Teachers Being Proactive

Classroom teachers have to play an important role in fostering a positive relationship with military and veteran children. Jing, Wenbin, and Jianxin (2011) noted that positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students is essential to student success and have powerful and lasting effects on the lives of the students. When the teachers stimulate an emotionally warm relationship between the military or veteran child, it creates a sense of security in the school environment for the child. This security is not always present at home where a parent may be missing for long periods due to work assignments such as deployment or in situations where the family relocates.

The teacher's effort will ignite well-being in the child. This in turn opens the avenue for child comfort and promotes creative exploration in the learning environment. To do this educators should incorporate six initiatives in the schools' structures: Teachers being proactive, establish routine, develop welcome committees, devise a

buddy system, train teachers, nurses and counselors, and working adopt systems.

Establish Routines

After relocations, children have so much going on in their minds. They are familiarizing themselves with the buildings, roads, buses, and a myriad of things. One way that a school can lessen the impact is by offering an established routine for these children. This means that they will know what to do at given times during the course of a day.

Welcome Committee

The welcome committee is a set of teachers and students who volunteers to greet new students and support them emotionally, and encourage them in the new school. This committee will see to it that the child understands the routine and helps them to familiarize themselves with the building and the expectations of the school. The committee will also introduce the child to the extra-curricular activities that the school provides and help him or her find the one of interest.

Buddy System

The buddy system is as an extension of the welcome committee. The new student, paired with a peer, will have lunch, share free time, become even more familiar with the campus and also be a study and support partner. This system can be made entirely of military students or supported by civilian students. This could also blossom into a support group or social group, supported by teachers, where all the members could meet socially.

Train Teachers, Nurses, and Counselors

Workshops and staff development will be done with teachers, nurses, and counselors to familiarize them with the needs of a military and veteran child. Often, we omit the resources of the nurse in the regular running of the school. However, this initiative solicits the aid of the nurse as he or she understands the psychological/mental impact certain events have on a child. Hence, they are included to provide professional medical guidance.

Adopt Systems

There are systems in place that states schools have assimilated into their programs to help military students' progress in schools. One of which is the Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children.

It provides guidelines for school districts to aid in removing barriers in school transition for military students that relocate in school districts so that they can graduate on time and through a smooth process (Gomez & Ybanez, 2012).

Contacting military bases is always a good source of support. Military members can be invited to be a part of the social group on the campus and other school events. They can also provide support and resources to the schools through their military liaison counselors.

The military also provides services through the Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA) is a national organization of school superintendents which with local school districts and commanders to highlight best practices and partnerships that can further meet the needs of military families. The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) is a civilian agency of the United States Department of Defense that manages all schools for military children and teenagers in the United States and also overseas at American military bases worldwide (Department of Public Instruction, 2015).

Adolescent students of military personnel require special educational care. They struggle through the age development process, the stresses of deployment, relocation, reintegration, parental PTSD. When the appropriate resources and care are not afforded at school, educators are not doing their part in addressing all aspects of a child's educational well-being. The major objective in facilitating adolescents in school is to reduce anxiety, withdrawal, anger, and non-conformity, along with other emotional or behavior problems, physical health, emotional well-being, and educationally deprivation. Adolescents with military parents deserve the best schooling necessary for them to achieve academic success and reach their full potential. Educators must play their role in education the nation's children regardless of their background.

Faith-Based Institutions/Community Involvement

According to Barnes (2014) religion occupies a significant sphere of the lives of Americans in general and African Americans in particular. Consequently, schools should establish partnership with the communities and faith-based institutions to help students to see the connection between the school and real life experiences. African-American students especially, value relationships. Hence, getting the community and faith-based institutions to foster a connection will help them to build relationships. Faith-based institutions bring to the table a familiar place for students. This will help them to develop bonds so learning can take place. This bond from the community extends to educators a myriad of resources to aid in strengthening the students'

social wellbeing that eroded through separation from their parents, families, or from their original communities.

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